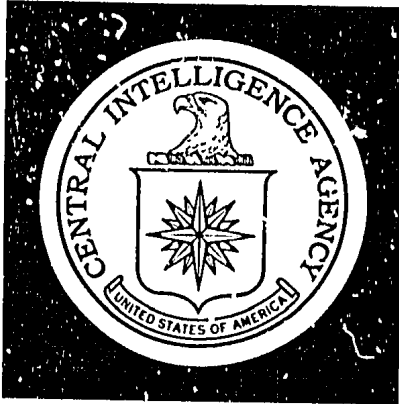


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OFFICE OF
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

MEMORANDUM

Black Protest and Rhodesia's Future

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28 January 1972

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

28 January 1972

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Black Protest and Rhodesia's Future*

FOREWORD

The intensity and extent of black opposition to the proposed UK-Rhodesian settlement have come as a surprise -- to the UK, the Rhodesian government, and the world at large. This memorandum examines the broader implications of the protests, which may mark the opening of a period of renewed tension in southern Africa.

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Genesis of the demonstrations by Rhodesia's blacks

1. In late November, after almost a year of intense but low-key negotiations, the UK and Rhodesia agreed to settle their

* *This memorandum was prepared in the Office of National Estimates and discussed with other components of the CIA, who are in general agreement with its judgments.*

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long-standing dispute. In return for British recognition of Rhodesian independence and the legitimacy of the white minority government (and at least an implicit understanding that UK sanctions would be ended), the Smith regime agreed to certain conditions which would lead to a very gradual improvement in the economic and political status of Rhodesia's blacks.

2. A major condition was British insistence that the settlement be acceptable to the blacks, who comprise 95 percent of Rhodesia's population. Smith turned down Douglas-Home's proposal to hold a referendum. Finally, it was agreed that the UK would appoint a commission to canvass Rhodesian opinion. A further British condition was that Smith release a number of black nationalist leaders who had been held in detention, most since 1965.

3. It was expected that the commission would hear a few negative voices, but that black opinion would generally favor the settlement terms. The regime particularly counted on support from the couple of hundred tribal chiefs, who are hand-picked and salaried by the government to represent the 4 million blacks -- 80

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percent of the total -- who live in rural areas. So far as we know, no one in London or Salisbury suspected how deep black antipathies run, or that great masses would be willing to risk arrest by engaging in open protest.

4. The 16-member UK Commission, headed by an eminent jurist, Lord Pearce, arrived on 11 January. Meanwhile, leaders of black groups opposed to the terms quickly formed a coordinating group, the African National Council, to organize mass protest. A week later, as the Commissioners set out to test the opinion of urban blacks, they were met in nearly every major black town by large crowds of Africans -- e.g., 6,000 in Gwelo -- voicing opposition to the settlement. More surprisingly, the Commission's early sorties into tribal territories also showed almost unanimous opposition. In more than 50 public meetings in the countryside, only one of the puppet tribal chiefs has voted in favor.

5. As the demonstrations in several black townships turned to riots and looting, the government reacted viscerally with mass arrests, both of rioters and of nationalist leaders, and temporarily cancelled hearings by the Commission. The disturbances subsided

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by 23 January, leaving a total of 14 Africans dead and several times that number wounded in the week of protest and violence. The demonstrations, and the regime's sweeping arrests, also threw the Commission into confusion and left the settlement in doubt.

6. On 21 January the Prime Minister delivered a tough speech to the nation. Moving in part to forestall charges of softness from his right-wing critics, Smith affirmed the regime's intention to continue taking "firm action whenever the need arises", and said he had warned the British earlier that granting their request to release political prisoners would lead to trouble. While thus blaming Douglas-Home for the violence, Smith also revealed his anxiety that the demonstrations might sabotage prospects for the settlement. He warned the blacks that rejection would mean a return to the *status quo* -- i.e., the racist Rhodesian constitution of 1969. He charged them with failing to see where their self-interest lies, then asked:

"What greater proof could anyone have of their lack of maturity, lack of civilization, their inability to make any constructive contribution?"

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In black townships, the sound of exploding myths

7. The riots have demonstrated several important facts. First of all they demolished Douglas-Home's comforting delusion that an orderly sampling could be taken of Rhodesian black opinion. In fact there are no representative political leaders or organs in Rhodesia through which the blacks could have made their opinions known. Unauthorized political activity is suppressed, black officials are appointed from the center, and black leaders who openly oppose government policy are removed and jailed. Demonstrations -- which are illegal in Rhodesia -- are the only means left for expressing black political dissent.

8. White officials have helped -- probably inadvertently -- to provoke the demonstrations. Local authorities are reported in several instances to have denied blacks permission to meet to discuss the terms of the proposed settlement. In some outlying areas officials distributed vernacular summaries of the settlement and attempted to explain its benefits; but members of the African National Council and others who oppose the settlement were forbidden to speak to village or tribal gatherings. The regime wanted a "yes" vote on the settlement

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question, and tried to keep the blacks from hearing opposing views. Obviously, this failed.

9. The demonstrations have also shown the world the deep gulf that exists between Rhodesian blacks and whites. The official image of a benevolent white regime guiding contented and politically apathetic natives toward a better future now lies shattered.

10. The most surprising development has been the rapid emergence of effective black leadership and organization in the eight weeks since Smith and Home announced the terms of the proposed settlement. At that time the blacks were widely thought to be fragmented, almost leaderless, and frightened into political dormancy by the Rhodesian security apparatus. Most of the known opposition leaders have been in jail for years; some were released at British insistence before the present sampling began. Thousands of blacks took part in the demonstrations, which occurred in a half-dozen major towns and cities, some separated from each other by 500 miles or more. The demonstrations showed clear signs of planning and organization. In most instances they were timed to occur with the

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local arrival of Pearce Commission members. In a few cases they seemed to be related less to the settlement question than to more immediate local issues: in one instance a miners' strike, in another to rumors that local beer was being watered. Overall, their success suggests a capacity for planning, coordination, and communication among black organizations and communities, far greater than the government had any knowledge of.

11. As for the settlement, the demonstrations have driven home the point that the agreement was drafted by UK and Rhodesian white leaders representing predominantly European constituencies. Blacks neither participated nor were consulted. Hence it should come as no surprise that many blacks view the terms as unresponsive to their grievances and aspirations and, therefore, unacceptable. But the demonstrations will have an impact far beyond the immediate issue of acceptability.

Political prospects: things look different now

12. Before the demonstrations, a UK-Rhodesian settlement seemed to hold the best chance -- though a small one -- for creating an environment in which racial cooperation and black progress might develop.

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Rhodesia's whites looked forward to a reduction in racial tensions, and to broader acceptance, both from black Rhodesians and from other countries, of white minority rule for the indefinite future. The demonstrations and riots have changed all this. Now, settlement or no, Rhodesian politics seem certain to be dominated for the next several years by black-white antagonism.

a. For white Rhodesians

13. The extreme right-wing members of the Rhodesian Front, Smith's own party, have been only lukewarm, at most, toward the settlement, which they feel goes too far. Their acquiescence reflected a conviction that the terms will prove not to be binding: one rightist MP praised the proposed constitutional guarantees for blacks as so loose that an ox-cart could be turned around in them.

14. For most white Rhodesians Smith's hard-line speech of 21 January offered needed reassurances that the government is in control, and that no threat to white minority rule will be tolerated. Many will be disappointed if the settlement with the UK falls through, but are not likely to blame this on Smith. So long as he continues to crack down hard on black dissidents -- and he has both the will

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and the means to do so -- he probably will not be seriously hurt politically. Meanwhile, the few white voices in Rhodesia which have been calling for relaxation of harsh racial policies and for a halt on the march toward apartheid are likely to go unheeded for a long time to come.

b. For black Rhodesians

15. Rhodesia's blacks have proved to themselves and the world that they are not a docile and pliant mass, as they had been pictured. The demonstrations have probably brought them a new feeling of solidarity; an awareness of their capability to organize, to protest, and to confront the regime. It also brought a sense of power and exhilaration, and renewed hope for change. But there is a price for all this. A wave of arrests and detentions is already underway, and most of Rhodesia's black nationalist leaders are likely once again to end up in jail or in exile.

16. It is too early to judge whether the past two months of relative political freedom allowed black leaders time enough to establish durable political structures. It is also unclear at this stage just what roles the long-dormant Rhodesian black liberation

movements played in the recent events.* The record of these groups is a dismal one, marked by personal and tribal bickering and by utterly ineffective attempts to organize violent action against the Smith Regime. The movements have attracted only a small and fluctuating rank-and-file membership, consisting mostly of illiterate tribesmen. They are hard to motivate, and tend to respond to the rigors of guerrilla life by going back home. Ill-equipped and often untrained, such guerrillas are no match for the Rhodesian security forces and their network of informers. Guerrilla bands usually are rolled up within a few days of crossing the borders into Rhodesia.

17. The two main black liberation groups, ZANU and ZAPU, are reported to have buried their long-standing differences at least long enough to cooperate in organizing some of the recent protest. The problems that plagued them in the past, however, will probably persist; and it is unlikely that any of these groups will pose a credible threat to the regime in the next few years, at least.

* *Rhodesia's two major tribes, the Shona and Ndebele, are represented respectively by ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) and ZAPU (Zimbabwe African Peoples Union). Years of detention and exile, squabbling among the remaining leaders, and efficient Rhodesian police work reduced the activity of these organizations to nil. Recently a third group, FROLIZI (Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe) was formed by members of both ZANU and ZAPU. Its effectiveness has yet to be tested.*

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18. Meanwhile, few of Rhodesia's blacks will nurture any illusions that the government is likely to make significant concessions on segregation and civil rights. Whether or not the UK approves the settlement, the blacks are in for a long period of repression.

c. For UK-Rhodesian relations

19. Smith has already accepted the risk that his harsh security measures may scuttle the settlement with Britain. He aroused widespread indignation among the British government and press by the preemptive arrest of a former liberal Rhodesian prime minister, Garfield Todd, and his daughter. Indeed, Douglas-Home sent a special envoy to Rhodesia to inquire into these arrests. Smith's temporary prevention of further sampling in the tribal territories annoyed the Pearce Commission. The sampling has since been allowed to resume, though probably subject to more restrictive security precautions, and Lord Pearce has declared his intention to stay on until the process has been completed.

20. For the Heath government the recent developments have been a sharp setback in its Rhodesian policy. Until the

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demonstrations started, Heath seemed well on the way toward fulfilling a campaign promise to try to end the messy impasse with Rhodesia. The sanctions are costing the UK something on the order of \$100 million a year, but accomplish almost nothing. Probably more compelling has been the strong sentiment -- particularly among Heath's Tory constituents -- favoring a normalization of relations with the British settler regime in Rhodesia.

21. But there are constraints on how far Heath can go in seeking an accord. The British public is generally sympathetic to the aspirations of black Rhodesians, and it probably would not stand for an agreement which they clearly and overwhelmingly opposed. And unless there is a sudden turnabout in black sentiment and a massive show of support for the proposed agreement, it is hard to see how the Pearce Commission could find the black response anything but negative.

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22. If the settlement falls through, Heath will be criticized by the opposition for failing to consult Rhodesia's

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blacks before the terms of a settlement had been fixed. But most of his constituents, and probably most of the British public, would accept his claims that he has done his best to find a solution to a difficult problem; that a solution has eluded not only his regime, but the Labour government which preceded it; and that the problem may, in fact, defy solution for some time to come. In the absence of a settlement Britain and Rhodesia will probably seek a gradual, piecemeal normalization of their relations short of recognition

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d. *On other countries*

23. Any hopes in Salisbury or London that a phased and stretched-out settlement would allow the Rhodesian question to fade from world attention have been dashed by the black protests. Indeed, the current spotlight on Rhodesian events comes as an unexpected bonus to the black African states. The current Security Council meeting in Addis Ababa is expected to focus attention primarily on the southern Africa question.

24. The implications of black protest in Rhodesia will receive much attention at the Addis session. Most African nations

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see little to choose between non-settlement and a settlement reached over black Rhodesian protest. In the latter event the UK will come under more criticism; in either case UN members -- especially the US and other countries with global economic clout or with significant economic interests in Rhodesia -- will be urged to repudiate the white minority regime in Salisbury and to continue applying UN sanctions. Any US moves to dilute its sanctions will attract more attention in the months ahead.

25. The success of the demonstrations also will encourage a number of African states to seek greater support for Rhodesian black liberation movements. Attempts are likely to be made to enlist UN involvement through scholarships and medical and technical assistance. But the Rhodesian events will stimulate more talk than action. We doubt that Rhodesian insurgent activity will be much more effective in the future than in the past.

26. Thus the Rhodesian black demonstrations have not brought anything radically new to international relations. Rather they have brought the Rhodesia issue into sharper focus and have made it appear more urgent, so that other countries' dealings with the Smith regime will come under

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greater scrutiny and criticism during 1972. This will complicate US relations with both black and white governments in Africa.

27. The longer run implications of the protests, however, are more serious. The events in Rhodesia, occurring almost simultaneously with an unprecedented -- and apparently successful -- month-long strike by Ovambo contract-workers in Southwest Africa, suggest that southern Africa is in for increased political ferment and racial tension.

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